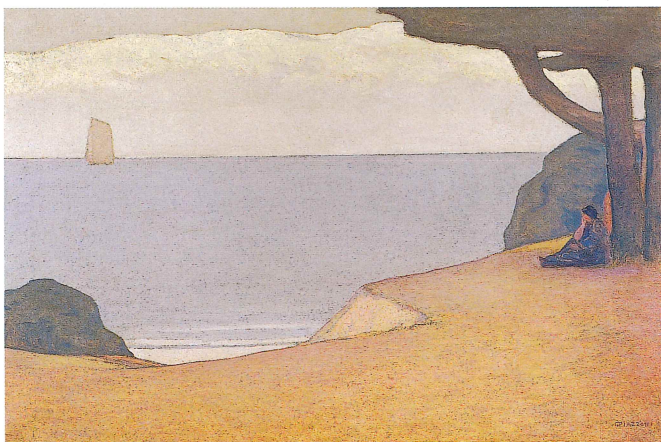


ANSEL
ADAMS
at 100

August 4, 2001–January 13, 2002

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



GOTTARDO F. P. PIAZZONI
Decoration for Overmantel, ca. 1926
 30 ³/₈ x 46 ¹/₄ in.
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Albert M. Bender Collection.
 Gift of Albert M. Bender

CONTEXT

Ansel Adams (1902–1984) was fundamentally self-taught as a photographer—as were most of his important contemporaries. Also like them (Manuel Alvarez-Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans) he did his first important work as an amateur. Adams continued in this provisional mode for a decade before committing himself, when he was twenty-eight, to a life in photography.

In the absence of the authority provided by a master, or the prescribed curriculum of a school, the character of the artistic world in which the novice begins his work, and in which his education progresses, is especially important. It is in this various and contradictory resource that he is likely to find the clues that will lead him to his own formulation of artistic truth.

The works in this room have been selected to suggest the character of Adams' artistic world during the critical years of his self-education, ending with his discovery, at the age of thirty-four, of the photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan.

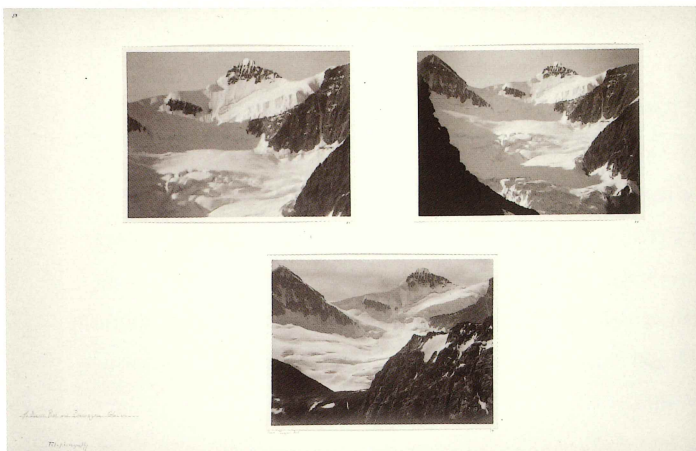


ANSEL ADAMS
Grass and Pool, ca. 1935
 7 ¹/₄ x 9 ¹/₁₆ in.
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of David H. McAlpin

CRUX

During the quarter century between the late twenties and the early fifties, Ansel Adams made tens of thousands of negatives, and completed many hundreds of photographs, of the American landscape. Most of them were made in the continental United States, west of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Most of that majority were probably made in his home state of California, and perhaps most of those were made in Yosemite Valley, or in the High Sierra that guarded the Valley on the east. Yosemite and the High Sierra constituted the place that he knew and loved best. Perhaps it was the *thing* that he knew and loved best.

Adams' pictures have revised our sense of what we mean when we say *landscape*. Even those who are more at home in the mysterious swamps, or in the incomprehensible boreal forests, or even those who are more at home in great cities, or in a handkerchief-size garden at the rear of an eighth-acre town plot—even many of these have been moved and enlarged by Adams' pictures, which demonstrate that even in the great theatrical diorama of Yosemite the mountains are no more miraculous than a few blades of grass floating on good water. His pictures have enlarged our visceral knowledge of things that we do not understand.



ANSEL ADAMS
McDonnell Peak and Bennington Glacier. Pictures 87, 88, and 89 from albums
 of the Sierra Club Outing of 1928.
 16 x 24¹³/₁₆ in.
 The Bancroft Library Pictorial Collection, University of California, Berkeley

LEARNING

The process of Adams' development as an artist is documented with extraordinary clarity in the proof albums of his pictures made on the Sierra Club Outings. Beginning in 1925 he made albums of photographs from these mass camping trips for not fewer than nine years between that year and 1936. These thick albums of prints were deposited at the San Francisco office of the club, where members could buy prints for (in 1927) one dollar each on white or buff stock, or \$2.50 on the fancier "parchment" stock in a paper folder. A less compulsive worker than Adams might have simplified the problem by editing his summer's take down to the thirty or forty best, which would presumably have still covered all the major peaks, canyons, and traverses. But luckily for photo historians, he seems to have included in his sample books every picture that was not a clear mechanical failure. Thus we have in these albums the record of a major photographer learning his craft. We can see him trying one framing and then another, then trying a wider view, and then a narrower one, then moving to a slightly new vantage point, from which he would again work his way through the promising possibilities, which changed as the light changed.

By 1928 one can see a new economy and sureness come into Adams' work. The peaks and ice fields and terrains of rubble begin to be—in addition to geological events—parts of pictorial patterns that possess an independent authority: designs that seem to recapitulate in visual terms the ancient history of the place.



ANSEL ADAMS
Bishops Pass, Kings River Canyon, 1936
 5⁷/₈ x 9¹/₈ in.
 National Archives, Washington, D.C.

MOTIVE

It was one of those mornings when the sunlight is burnished by a keen wind and long feathers of cloud move in a lofty sky. The silver light turned every blade of grass and every particle of sand into a luminous metallic splendor: there was nothing, however small, that did not clash in the bright wind, that did not send arrows of light through the glassy air. I was suddenly arrested in the long crunching path up the ridge by an exceedingly pointed awareness of the light. The moment I paused, the full impact of the mood was upon me. I saw more clearly than I have ever seen before or since the minute detail of the grasses, the clusters of sand shifting in the wind, the small flotsam of the forest, the motion of the high clouds streaming above the peaks. There are no words to convey the moods of those moments.

Ansel Adams, ca. 1923

One might guess that Adams spent the next quarter-century trying to make a photograph that would give objective form to the sense of ineffable knowledge that on occasion, in his youth, inhabited him in the high mountains.

In conjunction with *Ansel Adams at 100* SFMOMA is proud to collaborate with the city of San Francisco and a variety of Bay Area organizations to celebrate the life and achievements of Ansel Adams at the centennial of his birth.

California Academy of Sciences

415.750.7145

www.calacademy.org

Throughout the fall, special lectures, programs, and book signings focus on nature photography and the life of Ansel Adams, who had a lifelong affiliation with the Academy. Don't miss the October 25 lecture, "The Art and Activism of Ansel Adams."

The Friends of Photography at the Ansel Adams Center

415.495.7000

www.friendsofphotography.org

On view December 18, 2001, to February 24, 2002, *Ansel Adams, A Legacy: Masterworks from the Collection of the Friends of Photography* focuses on the last years of Adams' life and the lasting effects of his artistic oeuvre.

Oakland Museum of California

510.238.2200

www.museumca.org

Between July and September 2002, the Oakland Museum offers a three-part exhibition exploring Adams' artistic milieu, his life's work, and his ongoing influence.

SF Camerawork

415.863.1001

www.sfcamerawork.org

From October 23 to November 24, 2001, SF Camerawork presents *Landscape*, an exhibition examining conceptualist influences in contemporary landscape photography—a genre strongly marked by the legacy of Ansel Adams.

SF Performances

415.398.6449

www.performances.org

SF Performances, one of the Bay Area's premier presenters of recitals, chamber music, jazz, and contemporary dance, dedicates its 2001–2002 series of piano recitals to the memory of Ansel Adams, an accomplished pianist and lifelong lover of music.

Sierra Club

415.977.5500

www.sierraclub.org

Special Sierra Club outings for Bay Area schoolchildren combine visits to SFMOMA with hikes in Muir Woods, while a September lecture explores Ansel Adams' longtime involvement with the organization. Additional activities to be announced throughout the year.

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum

510.642.0808

www.bampfa.berkeley.edu

On view December 12, 2001, to March 10, 2002, *Ansel Adams from the University of California Collections* presents a wide range of photographs by the artist, including images of Yosemite and the U.C. Berkeley campus, commercial projects, rare publications, and candid self-portraits.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

FREE TUESDAY PROGRAM

What Is a Modernist Photographer Anyway?

Jeannene Przyblyski, independent art historian and critic

Tuesday, August 7 • Noon

Phyllis Wattis Theater

Independent art historian and critic Jeannene Przyblyski discusses how photographers like Ansel Adams shaped and expanded artistic discourse in the early twentieth century.

SYMPOSIUM

Ansel Adams the Photographer

Anne Hammond, independent art historian; Kim Sichel, associate professor of art history and director of museum studies, Boston University; Joel Snyder, professor of art history, University of Chicago; John Szarkowski, exhibition curator; Alan Trachtenberg, Neil Gray Jr. Professor of English and American Studies, Yale University.

Saturday, September 8 • 1–5 p.m.

Phyllis Wattis Theater

Focusing on Adams' prolific career—from his role as a modernist to his collaborations with poets and writers—this symposium offers fresh and thought-provoking insight into Adams' impact on photography and modern art. \$12 general; \$6 SFMOMA members, students with ID, and seniors.

ART AND CONVERSATION

Reflections on Photography, Landscape, and the Environment

Robert Dawson, photographer, and Ellen Manchester, art historian

Friday, September 28 • 11:30 a.m.

Phyllis Wattis Theater

Dawson and Manchester present a brief overview of the complex relationship between photography and the environment in the American West over the last fifty years. Free with Museum admission.

TEACHER INSTITUTE

Discovering Place

Saturday, October 13 • 9:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m.

Lower level lecture room

In conjunction with the exhibition *Ansel Adams at 100*, this program examines the preeminent photographer's life and the significance of place in the medium of photography.

Tickets are \$35 general; \$30 SFMOMA members (fee includes education packet containing slides and other materials).

Advance registration required, call 415.357.4105.

LEARNING CENTER

The *Ansel Adams at 100* Learning Center, located at the end of the exhibition, features a multimedia program focusing on the key images and concepts of the exhibition. Archival footage of Ansel Adams at work and audio commentary by the artist and art historians provide in-depth exploration of the creative process and historical context. Viewing copies of the exhibition catalogue are also available.

AUDIO TOUR

Featuring commentary by exhibition curator and eminent photography historian John Szarkowski and archival recordings by Adams, this MP3 audio guide, produced by Antenna Audio, allows visitors to customize their own route through the exhibition. \$5 general/\$4 SFMOMA members, students with ID, and seniors.

DOCENT TOURS

Docent-led tours of *Ansel Adams at 100* will be held throughout its run. Please check signage in the Haas Atrium (behind the admissions desk) for a daily schedule.

PUBLICATION

Featuring over a hundred exquisite reproductions, an essay by exhibition curator John Szarkowski, and a foreword by SFMOMA Senior Curator of Photography Sandra Phillips (softcover only), the *Ansel Adams at 100* exhibition catalogue documents the life and work of one of the twentieth century's most beloved and influential photographers.

Deluxe hardcover with limited-edition print \$150 (members \$135)

Softcover \$50 (members \$45)

WEB SITE

www.sfmoma.org



ANSEL ADAMS

Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake, Alaska, 1948 (print 1949)

7⁷/₁₆ x 9⁵/₁₆ in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of David H. McAlpin



ANSEL ADAMS

Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake, Mount McKinley National Park, Alaska, 1948 (print 1978)

15¹/₈ x 19¹/₈ in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the photographer

RECONSIDERATION

Adams was, by strength of will if not by nature, an optimist. As a social being—conservationist, teacher, writer, and friend—he repeatedly shrugged off the pessimistic strain in his view of the world's prospects, in order to return with enthusiasm to useful work.

But in his work as an artist there is from the beginning a darker side. His intuition of nature did not shrink from the knowledge of omnipresent struggle and death. The best of his pictures possess a peculiar tenseness—an edgy, nervous vitality—that is only barely contained, and that speaks perhaps to the ephemeral nature even of mountains.

In the last third of his life Adams made few new photographs that entirely satisfied him. During these years much of his energy as a photographer was devoted to the reinterpretation of negatives that he had made years earlier. To many of his admirers, these later revisions seem often to replace lyrical intensity with melodrama, and precision of feeling with extravagance.

Yet it was clearly Adams' right to make the change, and we should not be too swift in judging him wrong. Those who view art as self-expression might view these late prints as the last testament of an artist whose view of the world and the future had darkened.



ANSEL ADAMS
In Golden Canyon, Death Valley, ca. 1946
 7⁷/₁₆ x 9⁷/₁₆ in.
 George Eastman House

RESPONSIBILITY

The interests of an artist and of his audience are in the end quite different. As Adams' audience we are grateful to him for enlarging our emotional knowledge of the natural world, the knowledge of its constant mutability—that it is (one might say) alive. If we avert our eyes for a moment, we will return them to a different world, a constant source of wonder and deep surprise, which we love not only as an aesthetic delight but as a deep moral cryptogram to which we have no key.

An artist is also a member of art's audience, and as such he shares our interests; but finally he is interested in something else. He is interested in demonstrating to himself, by the authority of his work, that his world is not an illusion, not an invention of the imagination, but rather a real world, of which he is therefore a real part. So if we ask the question, what did Ansel Adams do for us? one useful answer would be: nothing; he did it all for himself.



HARRY CALLAHAN
Grasses in Snow, Detroit, 1943
 3⁵/₁₆ x 4¹/₂
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Michael D. Francis

FURTHER POSSIBILITIES

Adams' legacy to photography has not been exclusively, or even primarily, to photographers whose work resembles his own, or who haunt the places he loved most deeply. Rather, the central lesson of his work is that photography—used with rigor, intelligence, and passion—can help us enlarge and enrich our understanding of and our affection for the natural world.

It is clearer to us now than it was a century ago that this understanding and affection must extend not only to those supernal landscapes that we preserve as great outdoor museums, but equally to our own modest and precarious gardens, and even, if we can manage it, to the right-of-ways of our superhighways.

John Szarkowski

Organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
Made possible by Hewlett-Packard.



Local sponsors: KRON 4, SF Gate, The Chronicle, and Classical 102.1 KDFC.

Ansel Adams at 100 Exhibition Tour

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art	<i>August 4, 2001–January 13, 2002</i>
The Art Institute of Chicago	<i>February 20–June 2, 2002</i>
The Hayward Gallery, London	<i>July 4–September 22, 2002</i>
Kunsthbibliothek, Berlin	<i>October 10, 2002–January 5, 2003</i>
Los Angeles County Museum of Art	<i>February 2–April 27, 2003</i>
The Museum of Modern Art, New York	<i>July 9–November 4, 2003</i>

The albums of the Sierra Club outings in this exhibition are on special loan
from The Bancroft Library Pictorial Collection, University of California, Berkeley.